Divine Siblings?

The Pre-Christian Ancestry of Baba Yaga and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa

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Foreword

Being originally Polish and living in Western Europe for a long time made me realize how little do I know about pre-Christian Slavic mythology, that is beyond the folk- and fairy tales. The direct inducement was growing influence of the catholic Church in Poland in recent years and with it a role the Virgin Mary, especially the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, plays in Polish everyday life. It is my opinion, that this role cannot be satisfactory explained by a prominent presence of the Catholic Church in modern Poland. So my question would be: is Polish veneration of the Virgin Mary represented by the Black Madonna of Czestochowa a result of intended interference of the Roman Catholic Church or of a syncretism with a strong pagan female cult persevering in the countryside? And how close is she to another strong Slavic feminine presence, the Baba Yaga of the Russian fairy tales.

Slavic Mythology and cosmology

The linguistic unity, and very slight dialectal differentiation of the Slavs until the end of the first millennium CE, is perhaps the reason for a uniformity of early Slavic religion. It has been argued that the essence of early Slavdom was ethnoreligious before being ethnonational; that is to say, belonging to the Slavs was chiefly determined by conforming to certain beliefs and practices rather than by having a certain racial ancestry or being born in a certain place.

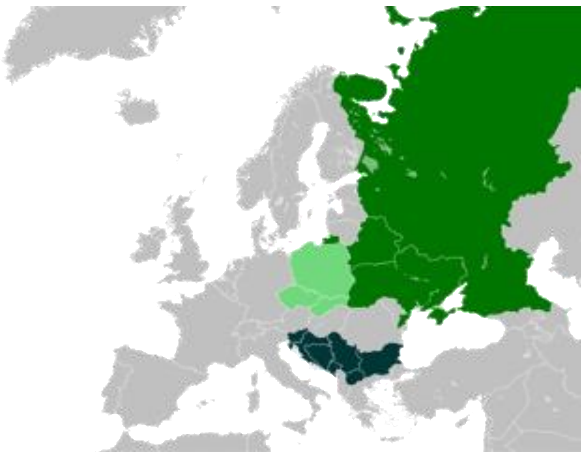

Fig. 1. Map of countries in Central and Eastern Europe where Slavic languages predominate, Dark green represent Southern-, light green Western-, the rest are the Eastern Slavs.

The original pre-Christian, especially Polish, beliefs are among the most mysterious historical 'pagan' religions in Europe simply due to the scarcity of the written historical records and the successful Christianisation. There are scarcely any primary sources where the pre-Christian Slavic beliefs and habits are mentioned, and the historical value is questionable, as most of chronicles were written in the beginning of second millennium by a Christian scribes and therefore could be bias.

1. *Dagome iudex*, one of the earliest historical documents relating to Poland that survived only in a form of a summary completed c. 1080 (the original was created in

c. 991). It bears huge importance to Polish history, since it provided a general description of the lands belonging to the king Mieszko.

2. *Chronicon Thietmari* (Thietmar's Chronicle) is an 11th-century chronicle about Saxon emperors written by Prince-Bishop of Merseburg. It includes some valuable informations about the Slavic tribes east of the Elbe river and the early state of the Polish people. Worth noting is that the empire was running wars against the Polabian Slavs and the Poles, and some desriptions might've been tendentious.
3. *Chronica Slavorum* (Chronicle of the Slavs) by Helmold (12-century Saxon historian and priest), describing Slavic tribes the lived in the territories of the modern-day north-east Germany. Similarly to the Thietmar's Chronicle, some descriptions might've been tendentious. He writes, that in 12th century nominal Christians did not know Christian rituals and continued to wortship trees, watersources and woods.
4. *Primary Chronicle* (also: Tale of Bygone Years) is a chronicle about the history of Kievan Rus' from about 850 to 1110, considered to be a fundamental source in the interpretation of the history of the Eastern Slavs. It includes valuable mentions about the West Slavic tribes and states, and general descriptions about the Slavic pagan gods.
5. *Chronica Boemorum* (Chronicle of the Czechs) written in 12th century by priest and historian Cosmas of Prague, includes descriptions of the legendary foundation of the Bohemian state and foundation of the Czech Přemyslid dynasty.
6. *Dalimilova kronika* (Chronicle of Dalimil), 14th-century chronicle about the Czech history, compilation of the information from older Czech chronicles written in Latin and the author's own experiences, it was the first chronicle written in the Old Czech language.

For this essay I inclined to focus on Polish literature on the subject, but I also consulted non-Polish sources relating to West- and East Slavic peoples, including the extinct tribes of Polabians and Pomeranians. A bit of an irony: the extinct culture of theirs is much better documented than the existing proto-Slavic tribes.

Scarcity of the original sources doesn't mean that our knowledge of Slavic religion amounts to nothing. No extant mythical corpus and scant information from Christian writers, have forced scholars to look for a material elsewhere. Slavic folklore in particular turned out a to be a fruitful ground for research. The pagan tales told many centuries after the introduction of Christianity preserved some of the most rudimental Slavic mythical conceptions. Slavic traditional oral literature contains many myths which describe the creation of the world in terms quite different from those of the Biblical account. These myths often involve a conflict or rivalry between God and the devil. The devil (or sometimes a bird) dives to the bottom of a primeval ocean to retrieve earth. This *Earth Diver* myth has been recorded in Siberia, South and Southeast Asia, and in North America. In Eastern Europe, it appears in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, and Bulgaria. Some scholars have searched for the origin of this myth in ancient Iran, others in Siberia. It appears to have reached the Slavs from Finno-Ugric peoples. Besides the form of a prose myth, a small number of Christmas carols have been recorded in Galicia (Western Ukraine) which

present doves or other birds as diver-creators.[1] One of such survived tales, told by a Polish peasant from near Sieradz in the late 19th century, may actually tell us a lot about how Slavic peoples imagined the beginnings of the world:

> "In the beginning there was nothing other than heaven and ocean, God in his boat, and a devil created from the sea foam. (somehow the got into the boat together) It was Devil, him always wanting more for himself, who suggested to God the idea of creating the world, as he couldn't accomplish it himself. The Devil dived in and came back with a handful of sand taken from the bottom. God scattered it on water and created the beginnings of the Earth, which however was so small that they both hardly fit. God and Devil inhabited the Earth, but the Devil wanted it all to himself and decided he would push the sleeping God off into the water. But all he did was to make the Earth grow from the God's side to the East, and from his side from to the West. When God woke up he got angry, broke up with Devil and with thunderbolts banned him into the abyss of the underworld and withdrew to the Heavens"

The rivalry between God and Devil is also documented in the "Tale of the Bygone Years" (Primary Chronicle) during a dispute about creation of man:

> "They said, 'We know how man was created'. He sked, 'How?' They answered, "God was bathing in the bathhouse and sweated, he wiped himself with a rag, and threw it down from heaven onto the earth. And Satan quarrelled with God about which of them should create man out of it. And the devil created man, and God put a soul in him. And that is why, if a person dies, his body goes into earth, and his souls to God'" (Likhachev 1950, 118).[2]

Introduction to Slavic Mythology

There are two "schools" of looking at proto-Slavic beliefs. One, dating from 19th century's Alexander Afanasiev's, holds that the world organizes itself according to an oppositional and yet complementary cosmic duality through which the supreme God expresses itself. This duality is represented by *Belobog* ("White God") and *Chernobog* ("Black God"), collectively representing heavenly-masculine and earthly-feminine deities, or waxing light and waning light gods, respectively.[3]

The nineteen century scholars of the school of cultural evolution (like Frazer, Tyler, Bruckner) did not analyse the Slavic beliefs beyond the stage of animism and did not believe that Slavs invented their own pantheon of gods. New insights developed with Georges Dumezil around the seventies of the 20th century. In *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* from 1976, Dumezil noted that in the case of Indo-European peoples, a tripartite

[1] Johns, A. (2005). Slavic creation narratives: The sacred and the comic. *Fabula, 46*(3), 257-290. Retrieved from http://proxy.uba.uva.nl:2048/docview/204292918?accountid=14615, dd. 2-02-2019.
[2] Ibid., 263.
[3] Johns, Slavic myths, 272; Hanuš 184; 151–183; Heck 1852; 289–290 in Gasparini 2013.

structure appears, with mediation deities between opposites. The first function gods being "sovereign" like Mitra, second function would be war and third healing.

The first all-round visions of the pantheon were in 1974 presented by Viacheslav V. Ivanov and Vladimir N. Toporov.[4] Then in 1982 Aleksander Gieysztor one of the most accomplished scholars of Slavic religion, in *Slavic Mythology* (Mitologia Slowian), observed that this cosmogonic myth weaves together two motifs typical of Indo-European mythology: one is the oceanic origin of all Being, from which all life originates, the other is the dualistic aspect of creation, a result of the collaboration of the two otherwise antagonistic mythical forces. These forces in the stories told by peasants to 19th century ethnographers, like the Earth Diver myth above, are represented by God and the Devil, but as Gieysztor suggests, they maybe only names behind which much more ancient deities hide. The radically dualistic aspect of this myth, known best from Iranian mythology (compare Ahur Mazda and Ahriman) is further explained by the long-time close relations which connected Slavs and Iranian tribes (like the Sarmatians) living in the northern Black Sea area. In fact, as Gieysztor proves, much of the most essential Slavic religious vocabulary owes to these close neighbourly ties, including the words for heavens (Slavic *nebo,* Iranian *nabah*) or god (Slavic *bog* vs Iranian *baga*). Which is yet another fascinating chapter in the little known history of Slavic religion. The Indo-European ancestors of the Slavs inhabited the steppes of Asia and their two-wheeled wagons were the terror of the invaded peoples. The Slavs were the last Indo-European wave associated with *Satem*[5] peoples, with whom Y chromosomics more connect them than with Western European neighbors. Cradle lay between Odra and the Black Sea. Borys Rybakov connects them with Scythian farmers, or Skolops.

There are still many inconsistencies and there are differences between three groups of Slavic people (Baltic-Western, Eastern and Southern), what amounts to many different names for the same of groups of deities, however, I will introduce the main deities and, when possible, compare them to Western traditions, either Celtic, Greek or Roman.

The cosmogony

How the world is created according to Slavs is not known, it is simply God's world and the world is God.[6] The most beautiful reflection on mystery of creation is in Rigveda (X, 129,7)

> "He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,
> Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not."

Mircea Eliade points out, that the God found in many Slavic versions of the Earth Diver is quite different from the creator God or gods of the Bible or ancient Greek mythology, he is

[4] The Russian philologists V.V. Ivanov and V.N. Toporov reconstructed in the 1960s the Proto-Slavic mythology through comparative study of various Indo-European mythologies and a large number of Slavic folk stories and songs.

[5] Satem people: in this case Balto-Slavic.

[6] Marturano, 23.

neither omnipotent or omniscient: sometimes he depends on the devil to find out how to create the world. Although the devil might seem to be more intelligent than god, he is more childish, playing tricks like hiding the mud or pushing God into the water.[7]

The world is understood as the whole, the so called holistic cosmology and the human beings are its integral part.[8] The beings populating the world are neither good nor bad, and they can take different forms (animals, plants). Birds were seen as special, because god chose them to move in the winter to a warm paradise.

Death or birth were not seen as traumatic experience, man simply returned to the matter from which he was created; it was the gods who decided whether he could return as human (metempsychosis) or other being(reincarnation). Therefore, it was better not to bother the gods too often and in most cases better to ask spirits of the ancestors for help. Of the ancestors the most important was the eponym, the founder after whom the tribe was named. To this day a place for him is reserved at the table during the Christmas Eve dinner, he is an absent guest. Most people nowadays would uphold this tradition without knowing it true ancestry.

The cosmology

A fairly typical cosmological concept among speakers of Indo-European languages, that of the Tree of Life, is also present in Slavic mythology and survived throughout the Slavic folklore for many centuries after Christianization. It is either an oak tree, birch or some sort of pine tree. Three levels of the universe were located on the tree. Its crown represented the sky, the realm of heavenly deities and celestial bodies, the trunk was the realm of mortals. They were sometimes combined together in opposition to the roots of the tree, which represented the underworld, the realm of the dead.

Kazimierz Moszynski, in a monumental ethnographical work, *Kultura Ludowa Slowian* (The folk culture of the Slavs*,*1929-1939)[9] collected a vast amount of data on topics such as knowledge, worship, beliefs, magic, fortune-telling, visual arts, music, onomastics and symbolism. The author relied on extensive but scattered literature and extensive field research that he carried out in Poland, Belarus, Baltic-regions and Ukraine.

Among others, he also describes how proto-Slavs envisioned the world.
The sky is a dome, sometimes made of stone, hanging on a nail or a pole (in East, Belarus, Ukraine Russia on a spindle) around which it turns, and the polar star is the axis of the world, her pepple. The stars are holes in a dome and lightning's are cracks. That means that there are two skies, one visible to people, and the other domain of Gods.

The Earth is a narrow crust surrounded by the sea, in the middle rises a three-topped mountain, called Triglav (three heads). The Slavs place the nail or the spindle on a top of a fish, a bull or four animals that by shaking their heads and bodies are causing the quakes.

The directions are estimsted by the position of the Sun, that in some traditions disappears behind the Triglav mountain, in the underworld. Under the earth is the second

[7] Johns, 2004, 274.
[8] Marturano, 24.
[9] Moszynski, "Kultura Ludowa Slowian", Warszawa, 1967-1968.

world, similar to ours, only inhabited by the very small people.[10] East and west (w*schod* and *zachod)* mean not only a direction but also time of a day, sunrise or sunset. On the other hand, north and south (*polnoc* and poludnie) means a time period, (resp. midnight and noon) rather than the direction.

The knowledge of stars and planets was limited. Of the planets, the best known was Venus and she was used in many rites. Interestingly, Slavs identify her with youth and old age at the same time, as she appears in the morning and in the evening. The moon, because of its phases, was as well identified with the stages of man's life. Although the knowledge of stars and planets was poorly developed, the Slavs knew the Pleiades and Orion, the Big and Small Dipper and the Milky Way.

The Afterlife

Something like Christian hell and paradise was not known. Hellfire as an ultimate punishment was considered a nonsense. The fire, after all, cleansed the impure and protected from disease and wild animals, not to mention returning the dead to the mother-earth by ritual burning.

Paradise was not something in the afterlife, where you end up after a sinless life, but a place somewhere on earth, the birds knew its location; they flew there for the winter and came back in the spring. It is not known whether the Slavic mythology knew the concept of the soul. Nevertheless, the gods did not leave people without help. They taught humans a set of complicated rituals to call for their help. As, for example, in the Bible when Jehovah gives precise instructions to Moses and Aaron and explains how he plans to defeat the pharaoh.

We know very little about the Slavic concepts of life after death. However, the diverse array of blood-thirsty demons, like upiers (Pol. upiór), vampires (wąpierz, wampierz), and strigoi (strzyga), which survived in Slavic folklore long after Christianization, could suggest a rather grim notion of the afterlife of the Slavic soul, if the concept was known.

Forms of worship

For a trace of old beliefs and rites the ethnologists studying the Finns above the Volga river, where the Baltic Slavs moved after persecutions from the Catholic Church.

Sacrifices and prayers were celebrated in the sacred groves. The prayer was carried out by the priest whose eloquence and oratory skills were of utmost importance. A sacrifice was seen as a simple exchange of gifts, the greater the sacrifice, the greater expectations of the deity and bigger the gratitude. The oldest and the most widespread was the "first-fruits" offer.[11] Deities were feeding on the smell, so it was important that offers were fresh and still warm, no matter whether it was bread or animal liver. (firstborn for the gods, later to the convent, church?) If god did not deliver, then he/it would be reminded of his duties by initially being threatened verbally. The next step would be taking the symbol out in the frost

[10] Moszynski, 27.
[11] Moszynski, 242-3.

and rain, in the end the symbol would be beaten and chopped up for firewood. Then a new image was made, hoping that the new idol would do a better job. [12]

There were different ways of showing respect to gods like uncovering and bending the head, sometimes kneeing on one knee. Two-knee kneeling and spreading face-down on the floor came probably later with Christianity; the Slavs would behave this way only in presence of powerful demons.

Protection from evil

The rituals were exercised by a priest in a various way:
1. With a body: hand gestures, individual or group dances.
2. With a face, using facial expressions of anger, happiness and such.
3. With the heart - sending and sharing thoughts was a domain of the heart.
4. Through speech, word - invocations etc.

The Slavs were pronouncing their family name in a whisper so that no one could hear it and used it for evil purpose. In rituals, especially group ones, hallucinogenic mushrooms and cannabis (marijuana), were used.[13]

The Slavs did not know the concept of the end of the world, according to them all the processes of the world had a cyclical character. They were not afraid of death, let alone the millennium.[14] According to the Slavs, the god did not have face. The portraits were interpreted as theft of parts of the body. The shadow, the traces of feet, hair, nails and such could not be touched, they could be used in evil magic. But it was even better to protect oneself against the evil eye or especially the *charm.* [15] A charm was something else than Evil Eye. Casting charm could be done through speech. Interestingly, praising could bring bad luck, jinx it. for example, it had to be canceled by various means. One of them was spitting (on the bent fingers of the right hand and the touching the forehead. A praised child or an animal also had to be spat on, always over a left arm,
Also a figue sign, with some embarrassment was used. Figue, an erotic symbol, also protected against evil.

Deities of Slavic religion,

Arranged in cosmological and functional groups, deities are inherited through mythology and folklore. It has to be noted, that most of the material presented on the following pages comes from 19th century work of two German scholars Friedrich Georg Creuzer and Franz Joseph Mone uit 1822, *Geschichte des Heidentums im nördlichen Europa. Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (Symbolism and mythology of the ancient peoples)*. They were naturally as scholars of romantic nationalism, interested in mythology of the Baltic, now extinct, tribes. I do, whenever possible, consult the latest scientific research mainly from Poland and Russia.

[12] Moszynski, 264
[13] Ibid., 20.
[14] Marturano, 30
[15] Wawrzeniuk: "Protective magic of the Slavs in the early Middle Ages" 2016

Pantheon

Gods are arranged as a hierarchy of powers begotten by the supreme God of the universe, **Rod**, known as *Deivos* in the earliest Slavic religion, *deus otiotus*, a distant God, taking care only of the heavenly affairs, everything else delegating to his offspring gods. Passive, with neither effigy or cult. According to Helmold's *Chronica Slavorum*, "obeying the duties assigned to them, [the deities] have sprung from his [the supreme God's] blood and enjoy distinction in proportion to their nearness to the god of the gods".[16]
The Absolute, a primordial God of the universe and of all other gods is a supreme creator of all things and kins and their power of reproduction. Scholars have defined Rod as the "general power of birth and reproduction".[17] The root **rod* means "birth", "origin", "kinship", "tribe" and "destiny". *Rodina* means family. Rod has been compared to the Celtic *Toutatis* (cf. **teutā*, "stock", "tribe"), and to the Latin *Quirinus*, the god of community and procreation (cf. **coviria*, *cūria*). According to Émile Benveniste' s definition of the Italic god of generation, it is the "god of the growth of the nation".[18] As the supreme god, Rod has also been compared to the Latin *Saturn*. The general Slavic term for "god" or "deity" is бог *bog*, whose original meaning is both "wealth" and its "giver". The term is related to Sanskrit *bhaga* and Avestan *baga.*[19] If this was the same power is not clear, the name was used mostly by the Western- and Baltic Slavs.

Belobog/Czernobog

Literally, respectively, "White God" (cf. *bieli*, "white") and "Black God" (cf. *cherni*, "black"). They represent the oppositional and complementary duality, expressed for instance as light and darkness, day and night, masculine and feminine. Belobog incarnates as *Svarog* ("Heaven") and the multitude of his manifestations, while Chernobog incarnates as *Veles* (also called Tjarnaglofi, i.e. "Black Head") and female deities.[20] All deities are manifestations of either Belobog or Chernobog, and in both categories they may be either *Razi*, rede-givers, or *Zirnitra*, dragon slayers.[21]

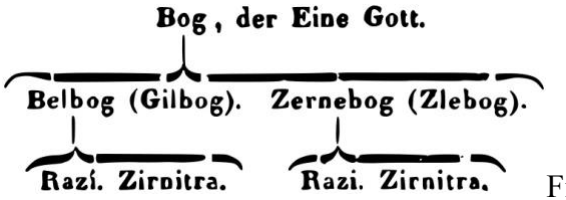

Fig. 2. Hierarchy of the divine, with the two categories proceeding from the supreme God, as illustrated by Creuzer and Mone.

[16] Rudy 1985, p. 5.
[17] Ivanits 1989, pp. 14–17
[18] Rudy, Stephen (1985). "Contributions to Comparative Mythology: Studies in Linguistics and Philology", 1972–1982. Walter de Gruyter, 14-15.
[19] Ibid, 5, 14-15.
[20] Leeming, David (2005*). The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Sydney: Oxford University Press) 2005, 360.
[21] Creuzer & Mone, 195–197.

Almost every male god had his feminine counterpart, either a wife or a sibling, sometime a twin. So had Rod. He was married to the goddesses, Deva to whom prayers for God's interventions were addressed. Her position is unclear, there are no primary sources, but possibly she was the mother of the twins, Belobog and Czernobog, or the three-headed dragon, Triglav. There is a Slavic creation myth that includes the three-headed dragon, resembling the fight of *Indra* with the dragon (*vrtrda/Vrtrd*) in Rig-Veda. Not before the last few decades scholars have come to recognize the fact that the central myth of the Rig-Veda is a creation myth.[22] From the blood of one of the heads of the dragon *Bialobog* (White god) was born, from the other *Chernobog* (Black god) and from the third the god of justice, Sud (only with the Southern Slavs) or possibly Svetovid by the Western and Eastern.[23]

Triglav

Studying the various sources, I understood that those three gods were often represented as a part of the three-headed god Triglav, but often Triglav was a separate god. I tend to see three gods, brothers, here. The motive of three brothers is often present in the folk tales. By the Baltic and Western Slavs *Triglav* literally means "Three-Headed". In this concept three gods personify the three worlds (Pravia-Yavia-Navia), or the heaven, the earth and the underworld, and sovereignty over the three elements of air, water and soil.[24] The three heads are Svarog, Perun and Svetovid or Veles. As the union of the three dimensions of reality represented as a mountain or tree, Triglav was defined as *summus deus* ("summing god") by Ebbo. Triglav has also been defined as a conceptualization of the *axis mundi*.[25] Triglav also represents the union of the three dimensions of time: past, present and future as a whole.[26]

Svetovid

Four-headed god of war, light and power. In some traditions, possibly Baltic because of many headed gods, *Svetovid, Gerovit, Porevit* and *Rugievit* are considered the four manifestations of Svarog,[27] but he is known as a separate deity in Polish folklore. A major temple dedicated to him was located at Cape Arkona (see p. 15.) The name *Svetovid* and its variants has been translated as "Worldseer". In some traditions, the heads have different colors and represent diferent deities, male and female, in the other they represent the four directions of space, the four seasons of time.[28] Svetovid has been described as the complete representation of the *axis mundi*, symbolizing the union of the four directions of space and the four dimensions of reality (Heaven, earth, water and the netherworld). He may be the most famous of all multi-

[22] Kuiper, F.B.J. Cosmogony and Conception: A Query, Source: History of Religions, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Nov., 1970), 91-138, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1061905; 5-01-2019.
[23] Acually, he seems to exist only in Southern Slavs mythology. (wiki)
[24] Leeming, 360.
[25] Dynda, 63.
[26] Ibid, 74.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Leeming, 359-360.

headed Slavic gods.[29] According to the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, the figure had four heads and four necks, and held a drinking horn in one hand. His holy animal was a white horse.

Perun; god of heaven and ruler of lightning.

Perun literally means "Thunder" but also "Oak" worshipped as the god of war. He is related to the Germanic *Thor* and other Indo-European thunder gods. He is the opposite polarity of Veles, the male god of the earth and the cattle. Perun is the personification of the active, masculine force of nature. His name, which comes from the Indo-European root **per* or **perk*^{w} ("to strike", "splinter"), could signify both the splintering thunder and the splintered tree.[30]

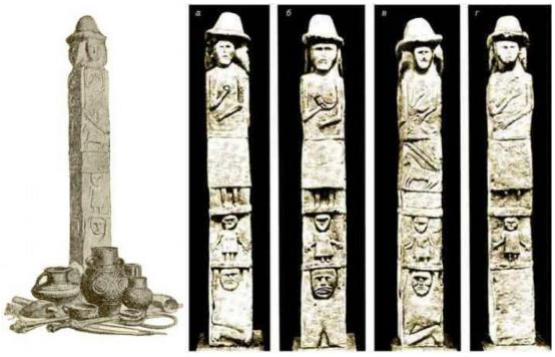

Fig. 3. Perun

Svarog, god of heavenly fire and his son Dazhbog, sun god

Svarog literally means "Heavenly fire" (cf. Indic *Svarga*), father of *Dazhbog*-Helios (his role was also to watch over the sexual behavior and punish infidelity). He is associated with military, blacksmithing, and with fire, both that of the household and that of the sun (Dazhbog).[31] He gave the first plow to the people and the communities started to form. The Indo-European root of the name is **swer* ("to speak"), related to **wer* ("to close", "defend", "protect"), but also **suar,* meaning strong light, heat. To this day the scorching heat is called *skwar* in Polish. *Jarog* and *Rarog* are alterations of the name, the second applied to a bird god of later folk religion, the Russian Firebird. Indeed, Svarog and his Indo-Iranian cognates are considered able to manifest as wind, birds or other animals. He represents the creative, virile power.

Veles – God of the earth, forest, cattle.

Veles is the chthonic god of cattle but also master of the forest and of wild animals, and god of commerce. This would also position him as the god of prosperity (as cattle was one of the

[29] Dynda, 59-62.
[30] Rudy, 6.
[31] Rudy, 7-8.

main markers of a family's wealth). [32] He is also the god of poetic inspiration and sight, as highlighted by his name which comes from the Indo-European root **wel*, which implies sight and magical ability.[33] The *Book of Veles* is dedicated to him.[34] Also known as the "Horned God", Veles is a male god of the earth, incarnating the "Black God" of dual theology.[35] As such he is the opposite of the heavenly manifestations of the "White God" (Svarog and his sons, but especially Perun). An alternative name of Veles that was used by Western Slavs is *Tjarnaglofi* ("Black Head", identifying him as *Chernobog*).[36] He is compared to the Indic *Varuna* among others.[37]

The goddesses

Deva, Rod's wife, also called Rozanica or Rodanitsa, also meant as a rede-giver.

Rod and Rozanitsa means literally "God and the Goddess", it is a conceptualization of the supreme polarity as male–female, formed by the masculine plus the feminine form of the root **rod*; it implies the union of the supreme God with matter to shape reality. The feminine form is frequently spelled plural, interpreting Rozanitse as the collective representation of the three goddesses of fate. Rozanitsa is an ancient mother goddess. In kinships, while Rod represents the forefathers from the male side, Rozanitsa represents the ancestresses from the female side. She is also called *Deva*, meaning the "Young Lady" or simply "Goddess", regarded as the singular goddess of whom all lesser goddesses are manifestations; she has been compared to the Greek *Aphrodite* and the Indic *Lakshmi* but especially to the Roman *Juno*, female consort of the supreme God, whom collectively represented the *Junones*, the spirits of female lineages who determined fate.[38] The north Russian name *Udelnica* means "Bestower" (of fate).[39]

There are five great goddesses, all being some aspect of the supreme goddess Rozanica. Some, not all, have their male counterparts. The most important of them is the goddess of moist earth. Primary waters were an environment in which people could not live.[40] The earth has emerged from the waters, with a mountain Triglav in the very middle of it. Water is therefore a female element,[41] the water gave birth to the earth, in a poetic way.

Mokosh, ("Moist"),

Mother goddess personifying the wet earth, associated with female works (notably weaving) and harvest. Her name literally means "Wetness", "Moist", and she is also known by the title

[32] Rudy, 34-35.
[33] Ibid., 25.
[34] *The Book of Veles* is a literary forgery purporting to be a text of ancient Slavic religion and history supposedly written on wooden planks.
[35] In the polish folk tradition, "horned god" is the synonym of the devil.
[36] Leeming, 360.
[37] Rudy, 42-45.
[38] Marjanic, 197-199.
[39] Machal, 249.
[40] Aruna – Rigveda.
[41] See. Babylonian Tiamat

Mat Syra Zemlya ("Damp Mother Earth") or *Matka*,[42] mother in Polish. A powerful mother-goddess giving life and protection for women, an "wide" goddess of the Finno-Ugric tradition, long before Slavs and Germanic tribes arrived. The Mother-Earth is continually ready to be fertilized. In agraric societies, plowing the earth was synonym to sexual intercourse. K.Moszynski mentions a god's command concerning the earth: You will give birth to people and you will devour them; what you create you will destroy, because it's yours by birth".[43] Mokosh is some her aspects reminds of *Kybele* or *Gaia.* Possibly it was her who transformed in Poland into immensely popular Black Madonna. Her Indo-Iranian equivalent is *Aredvi Sura Anahita*.[44]

Marzanna or Morana; masc. Marovit

Rural goddess who grows sprouts, but at the same time goddess of winter and death. Her opposite is *Zhiva*, see below. *Marovit* is another name of Marzanna or her male counterpart, symbolising the dying sun; the root **mar* means "weakness", "ruin" and "death".[45] Baba Yaga, to whom I devote a separate chapter, is also goddess of death, both young and old, associated both with birds and snakes, sky and earth surface. According to Leeming, who takes Marija Gimbutas as source, she is clearly cognate with the Indic *Kali* as the deathly aspect of the great goddess.[46]

Zhiva

Zhiva means "She who Lives", goddess of love, fertility and marriage. Zhiva has been compared to the ancient Roman *Ceres*.[47] She is the opposite facet of Morana, the goddess of death ("great goddesses" hereinbelow). She has been studied as the terrestrial and dry aspect of the great goddess.[48]

Lada, Dzieva, Devana; masc. Ladon

Goddess of hunting and of the forests. Her name is etymologically related to the Roman *Diana* and she is also functionally related to the Greek *Artemis*. Another name of Devana is *Ciza*, whose etymology is traced to the Slavic root **cic* or **cec*, meaning female, also mother's breast.[49] Under the name variations *Dzydzilelya*, *Zizilia* or *Didilia*, she is known as the goddess of love and wedding, fertility and infancy among West Slavs; this name is explained as meaning "she who pampers babies" (*dziecilela, dzieci* children in Polish), and

[42] Leeming, 360.
[43] Moszynski, 510.
[44] Rudy, 9.
[45] Hanus, 180.
[46] Leeming, 360.
[47] Marjanic, 193.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Hanus, 279.

with these functions she is compared to the Roman *Venus* or *Lucina*. Devana has been regarded as a manifestation of the great goddess Rodiva–Deva.[50]
Sometimes appearing as a chthonic triple-form goddess, or three goddesses, Lada Lele and Bod (distorted Baba, meaning an old woman). She is closest to *Hecate* or *Hekate* a goddess in ancient Greek religion and mythology, capable of both good and evil and associated with crossroads, entrance-ways, light, magic, witchcraft, knowledge of herbs and poisonous plants, ghosts, necromancy, and sorcery.

The end of Slavic gods

So, I reach now the really sad part, the "Gotterdammerung" of the Slavic gods. In 1168 Arcona, which had been the last point of resistance of the Polabian Slavs, was seized by the Danes under King Valdemar I. The event became the symbolical end of not only Slavic resistance but also the Slavic pagan religion. In a brutal display of power, the Christian invaders led by Bishop Absalon destroyed the ancient cult venues and idols, including the statue of Svantevit. As described by Polish historian Karol Modzelewski

The last moments of Svatevit are described by Saxo Grammaticus:

With a gigantic crash the idol tumbled to earth. The swaths of purple drapery which hung about the sanctuary certainly glittered, but were so rotten with decay that they could not survive being touched. The sanctum also contained the prodigious horns of wild animals, astonishing no less in themselves than in their ornamentation. A devil was seen departing from the innermost shrine in the guise of a black animal, until it disappeared abruptly from the gaze of bystanders.

The crowd of pagan followers watched as the armed invaders violated one taboo sphere after another. The fence around the shrine was taken apart, the curtains which enshrouded the statue were torn down, two men were ordered to chop down the legs of the sacred figure. Then a piece of rope was put around the god's neck, as he was dragged to the victorious camp, where the kitchen servants would chop him up for firewood.

These were the last moments of Svatovit and the gods of Slavic religion.

Spirits and Demons

Obviously, apart from the major gods, Slavic religion had a whole array of lesser deities, local gods, house spirits, and demons that survived in the rural areas and folk tales. In Slavic religion, everything has a spirit or soul, including houses, lakes, mountains, forests, animals and men. These spirits are generally called by various terms, including for instance *duch* ("spirit") in Polish, or *sjen* or *sjenovik* ("shadow") by the Montenegrins. They can be of the pleasant ("czart", from czary, to bewitch) or unpleasant (bies) variation. These spirits are

[50] Ibid.

considered able to leave or enter the body during a sleep, wandering about the world, the skies and the underworld.[51] As interesting as they are, I have decided to describe demons rather than spirits, as I find them more interesting. Mostly their world are the untouched parts of nature, the forest, marsh, lakes and swamps. Also, a certain time of day can be demon's domain: grey hour of the sunset or hot dry noon in the fields, darkness.

The first one is *Bieda*. One of the primeval demons and an immortal being, a shapeshifter. She brings misfortune, misery, hardship and grief. Her name means "hardship, poverty". She wanders on the Earth as an exceptionally tall and lean woman, resembling a fragile twig, and covers herself with tattered rags. She's nourishing herself on human happiness and luck, sucking it out of her victims along with all their vital forces up until everyone's death. Her presence can be noticed right afterwards in a series of disasters and troubles happening suddenly in the family. She can turn herself into any object or animal – it was thus advised to watch out for e.g. any new thing that had suddenly appeared in the house, birds like sparrows or swallows who had built their nests under the roof but didn't seem to lay eggs like the regular birds, or lone mice who seemed to be smarter than cats. She can't be killed. Many people failed by trying to burn or sink the object she turned into – but she would then escape, squealing and screeching loudly, only to turn herself again or hide into another object, often much harder to track downit's vital to find her and remove the unfamiliar object far from the household – preferably give it as a gift to an enemy. Some tales say that *bieda* could be tricked into entering a beautiful object which could be later gifted or tossed at enemy's property.

The other one is the *Planetnik*, *Shepherd of the cloud,* able to control the clouds by moving them around on long ropes. That way they can bring for example nourishing rain or damaging ice storms to the crop fields, or maintain a good weather for villages. Local Polish people bestowed a great respect for these spirits and always tried to gain their favours. They practiced various forms of magical actions. For example, it was common to throw a bit of flour into the air as an offering for the Cloud-Shepherds to burn special compositions of herbs for them, and then ring local church's bells in order to 'mark' an area where the clouds should be dispersed. Płanetnik would sometimes visit a house, always in dripping wet clothes even if the weather was hot and dry. In such situations it is necessary to greet him as one would greet a dearest member of the family or a closest friend – to feed him, to provide a good company and prepare a place to rest. However, it is forbidden to ask him anything about his identity (maybe unless he would start talking about it first). When appearing on the earth, płanetnicy are usually taking a shape of tall and old men, wearing simple clothes (usually traditional outfits made of white linen) and straw hats with a wide brim that are protecting their eyes from the sunlight. Sometimes an 'earthly płanetnik' is born. It is a human being who has an unusual ability to predict or even control the weather.

The survivors

[51] Machal, 227-228.

Various Slavic populations were Christianized between the 7th and 12th century. Pagan-Christian syncretism developed gradually in about five stages.

1. Acceptance by the hierarchy of the Church of the connection of elements of Pagan tradition with Christian elements; this form survived to this day. The so-called *apparent Christianization*, associated with the creation of the diocese and collecting tributes.
2. In the initial period of the Christianity tolerating some pagan rituals, mainly at the burials, but over time this disappeared as being in contradiction with the doctrine of the church. Gradual assimilation of the Christian way of life and behavior including a funeral rites mainly by the ruling classes.
3. Formal Christianization, periodical abandoning the promotion of doctrine after the formal baptism of the villagers etc.
4. Syncretism, which got out of control of the church, that is, the existence of old beliefs related to nature and demonology in the Christian religion.
5. Final Christianization; that is, the acceptance of doctrine by the entire populations.[52] (ht. 2, nb. 3, 29)

Christianity was introduced as a religion of the elite, flourishing mostly in cities and amongst the nobility. Amongst the rural majority of the medieval Slavic population, old myths remained strong. Christian priests and monks in Slavic countries, particularly in Russia, for centuries fought against the phenomenon called *dvoeverie* (double faith). On the one hand, peasants and farmers eagerly accepted baptism, masses and the new Christian holidays. On the other hand, they still persisted performing ancient rites and worshiping old pagan cults, even when the ancient deities and myths on which those were based were completely forgotten. This was because, from a perspective of the Slavic peasant, Christianity was not a replacement of old Slavic mythology, but rather an addition to it. Most of the old traditions were kept as a kind of secret knowledge among women in the rural parts. Worship of female deities is in some parts of Europe stronger than in other and syncretic processes cause shifts in their meaning and significance. As the male pagan Slavic god's did not survive Christianisation, the female apparently did in many incarnations of the Holy Virgin or more of less friendly demons in folk tales and traditions, like the empty plate at the table for the ancestor spirit. Two of such survivors are the Black Madonna of Czestochowa in Poland and the Baba Yaga from the Russian fairy tales. Both are very distinctive figures in Eastern-European folklore, but most enigmatic is Baba Yaga; a multi-facetted figure, researchers see her as a personification of Cloud, Moon, Death, Winter, Snake, Bird, Pelican or Earth Goddess, totemic matriarchal ancestress, female initiator, phallic mother, or archetypal image.[53]

[52] Wawrzeniuk, 29.
[53] Johns, 17.

Baba Yaga

Fig. 4. Anonymous Victorian print showing Baba Yaga

According to Dorothy Atkinson, the Russians, under the influence of Russian Orthodox doctrine, cherish deep respect and deep contempt for women. On one hand, a woman is the symbol of love, purity and sacrifice (the Marian view), on the other of sin, impurity and temptation. (the Eve's view).[54] The Marian view has caused women more damage than Eve's. The aureole of supremacy and moral superiority has been like millstones hanging on their neck. As the cause of such duality is often given the existence of the ambitious and enterprising elder sister of Peter the Great, Sofia. She was seen as talented and strong willed troublemaker, who freed herself of the "terem", the separate living quarters occupied by elite women of Muscovite Russia, and wanted to become Russia's first female tsar. In the course of the 18th century, stories about her lust for power and depravity were circling around being increasingly strengthened until she became identified with a witch Baba Yaga, an ambiguous character in the Slavic mythology.

Fig. 5. Baba Yaga riding a pig, in a Russian *lubok* (a type of print); possibly a satire on Peter the Great and his wife, or alternatively, a contest between Baba Yaga and a shaman. The figure is presented in monochrome by Johns (2004), who stated that it dates from late 17th or early 18th centuries. The object in Baba Yaga's raised hand is a pestle.

[54] De zuster van Peter de Grote, Meinema, A., 11.

In Slavic folklore **Baba Yaga** is a supernatural being (or one of a trio of sisters of the same name) and a prominent character in Russian fairytales; she appears as a deformed and/or ferocious-looking woman. Baba Yaga flies around in a mortar, wields a pestle, and dwells deep in the forest in a hut usually described as standing on chicken legs. Baba Yaga has associations with forest wildlife and the witchcraft, may help or hinder those that encounter or seek her out. She has a daughter.

Baba Yaga was first well documented in print in the 18th century. The "outstanding Russian poet, scientist, and grammarian" Mikhail Lomonosov referred to Baba Yaga in 1755 and in 1780, Vasilii Levshin published a literary fairy tale containing reference to Baba Yaga, and in 1788 there was a comic opera by Dmitry Petrovich Gorchakov in which Baba Yaga appears with traditional attributes of hut on chicken legs, and mortar and pestle. Details of these and other instances from the late 1700s and early 1800s are summarized by Andrew Johns.[55] By 1820, an authentic folktale with BabaYaga had been published. The compiler, Mikhail Makarov, considered Baba Yaga to be "some kind of Slavic deity, known to us from folktales."[56] There is mention of a Polabian-Slavic goddess, Tata (or Stata) Baba by a sixtieen century's French priest and geographer, Andre Thevet.

Fig. Tata or Stata Baba worshipped by peasants, as in Thevet.

According to Thevet (1575), who never himself visited Russia or any of the Baltic territories, her statue, worshipped as an idol by the Russians, represented a kind of Pieta,[57] possibly showing Thevet's Christian influence. *Stetewaldiu* in the Baltic tradition was a house-spirit. Although her affiliation with Baba Yaga is highly speculative, it is worth mentioning that Baba Yaga was often accused of stealing children for dinner.

[55] Johnes, Baba Yaga, 12-16.
[56] Ibid.
[57] La cosmographie universelle d'André Thevet, cosmographe du roy [microforme] : illustrée de diverses figures des choses plus remarquables veues par l'auteur, & incogneuës de noz anciens & modernes, XIX, 847; https://archive.org/details/cihm_40485/page/n805,

Fig. 6. Baba Yaga, by Viktor Vasnetsov (1917, Wikimedia), emphasizing Baba Yaga's reputation of kidnapping children for her dinner

Baba Yaga as the evil witch can appear in different roles:

- As a false mother, she is pretending to be a hero's mother;
- As an evil advisor;
- As an oger's wife/partner, the name Koshka has an association to a cat;
- As usurper; taking heroin's part;
- As a disrupter of family ties or hero's plans (exclusively male-centered);

It is tempting to affiliate Baba Yag with ancient Slavic deities like Forrester et al. have done,[58] critisizedf by J. Wood as "a little too eager to link Slavic figures such as the Kievan chtonic goddess Mokosh to Baba Yaga.[59] However, it seems that she does share some attributes with these deities. The preeminent authority on structure of fairy tales Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), examined a hymn *To the Lady of the Forest, Aranyāni* in the Rig-Veda. Although there is no mention hut on chicken leg, the *Aranyāni* is the Mother of Animals, has a house and/or wagon, and lives in the forest. "We readily recognize Baba Yaga and her hut."[60] Among formulaic components such as mentioned above, Propp adds the motif of Baba Yaga as gatekeeper to the boundaries and entrance to the other world. Her dialog with protagonists concerns entry to that world, and "reflects extremely ancient ideas."[61]

Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994), widely known for her ideas on the origins of Indo-European peoples, considered Baba Yaba "the ancient Slavic goddess of death and regeneration."[62]In her extended thesis on the great antiquity of certain folkways in Eastern Europe, Barber (2013) noted that some folklorists see in Baba Yaga an "ancestral helper along the maternal line." Johns (2004) documented the widespread occurrence of "baba" throughout Slavic countries, nearly always with the connotation of "old woman" and derived it from an Indo- European root * b(h)āb(h)- (* denoting a reconstructed root, i.e., Proto-Indo-

[58] Forrester, S., H. Goscilo, and M. Skoro (eds.). 2013. Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales. University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 202 pp.

[59] Wood, J. 2015. Book Reviews - Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales. Folklore 126: 238-239.

[60] ibid.

[61] Propp, V. "The Russian Folktale." Trans. & ed. S. Forrester, forward J. Zipes. (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2012), 387.

[62] Gimbutas, M. 1999. The Living Goddesses. Ed. And supplemented by M.R. Dexter, University of California Press, Berkeley, 286 pp.

European, thus implying considerable antiquity). "The origin and meaning of Iaga is [sic] far more obscure" (Johns, 2004) and several possibilities are reviewed, including derivations from Baltic and proto-Slavic. Another putative link to antiquity is Baba Yaga's affiliation with birds. Her geese, for example, steal children for her (Afanas'ev “The Geese and Swans”). Folktales connecting Baba Yaga with bird maidens were captured by Ivan Bilibin (1876-1942) in a water color.

Fig. 7. Baba Yaga and the Bird Maidens by Ivan Bilibin (1902) (Wikimedia).

In Russian and Polish folklore, bird maidens are sometimes *rusalki,* having features of archaic goddesses (half female human, half fish, half serpent, etc.) and often displaying malevolent habits. Quite a few scholars (Hubbs, Barber) considered them very ancient. "They … echo the hybrid goddesses of Tripol'e [Ukrainian Neolithic]."[63] Andreas Johns notes some connections of Baba Yaga with serpents as well as with birds. However, even if we established the origins of Baba Yaga, it would not necessarily have a bearing on her meaning to the storytellers and their listeners. [64]

The question arises why Baba Yaga survived in the folktales in this form?

The very nature of folklore, the surviving ground for Baba Yaga, is that it’s tales are, on one hand, the products of tradition, on the other of individual fantasy. It is therefore prudent to establish her role in female representation of the culture she belongs to, the Eastern and central Slavs (Russian, Ukrainians and Poles). She does have relatives in other than Eastern Slavic traditions. In Western Slavic (Czech) it is Jezibaba, a closest relative to Baba Yaga. Sorbs (the present East German territory) knew the Forrest Women, *Worawy*, related to *Poludnitse,* the Moon Ladies; Southern Slavs knew *Babice*, all of them appear either as a beautiful young or ugly old women, who attempt to harm young mothers, children and newborn babies. Olga Cherepanova concludes however, that there is no truly equivalent to Baba Yaga in South Slavic tradition.[65] In Germanic folklore, Baba Yagas ambiguous, sometimes helpful, sometimes malicious cousins could be: in Alpine regions *Perchta,* in Central and Northern regions Vrouw Holda or Holle. Both either punish lazy or rewards the

[63] Hubbs, 1988; in Frank Dugan “Baba Yaga and the Mushrooms”, (Fungi, ResearchGate, 2017)
[64] Johns, 41.
[65] Johns, 72.

good girls in various, sometimes gruesome way. For example, Perchta (or Perchtel) cuts the stomach of the lazy girls open and fills it with rubbish, as punishment. Despite those similarities there is no equivalent to Baba Yaga in German folktales.[66] There is a queen with a goose foot in France, supposedly to be a Ragnahilde, a wife of a Visigoth king, but no mention of the house on the chicken's leg.

The Black Madonna of Czestochowa

Fig. 8. Dressed and undressed.

The central symbol of the Marian cult in Poland, a centuries-old image of Mary and Child—Our Lady of Częstochowa—that is kept in the monastery of Jasna Góra in the city of Częstochowa, the Black Madonna of Czestochowa is a traditional, Hodegetria icon, of a type that evolved from its probable prototype in fifth-century Constantinople. **[67]**. The image was apparently rendered with original dark flesh tones (there being no evidence that the "black" coloration resulted later from smoke, fires, or the discoloration of age). It is probably of fourteenth-century manufacture, consistent with the lack of provenance before 1384 when the icon appeared at the Jasna Gora monastery.

According to legend, the portrait of Mary is painted on top of the table that had been made by Jesus himself while apprenticing to his carpenter father, Joseph. After Jesus's crucifixion, his mother allegedly took the table with her when she went to live in the home of a disciple, St. John. Upon the top of this, according to fanciful tradition, St. Luke himself painted her portrait. It was subsequently discovered, in catholic tradition by Helena, the mother of Roman emperor Constantine the Great (274–337 ce), among a remarkable group of treasures on a trip to Jerusalem—or so it is said in pious tales.[68] The locations of the reputed treasures were allegedly revealed to the then almost eighty-year-old Helena by divine visions. Helena returned with the picture to Constantinople, where it remained in a church until the eighth century. Then, threatened by war, it was carried for safekeeping to Eastern Poland. In 1382 the Tartars invaded but failed to discover the Holy Virgin's portrait because "a

[66] Ibid., 75.
[67]https://www.csicop.org/si/show/the_black_madonna_a_folkloristic_and_iconographic_investigation
[68] Aradi 1954, 62; Mullen 1998, 135.

mysterious cloud enveloped the chapel." Later, a local prince "was ordered in a dream by an angel to take the picture to an insignificant, obscure village named Czestochowa."[69] A contradictory legend tells how the icon was being transported for safekeeping when it was stored overnight in Czestochowa's monastery of Jasna Gora. On the following morning, when the image was returned to the wagon, the horses refused to move—a miraculous sign, it was thought, that it should remain there.[70] In yet another tale, the balking horses are those of invading Kozacs who in 1430 were attempting to take the icon as plunder. When the horses unaccountably stopped at the village limits, however, and no amount of beating could get them to move, the Black Madonna was abandoned. [71]In the latter tale, the Kozacs were so riled that they angrily grabbed up the icon, which had already been pierced by an arrow in the Madonna's throat during the siege, and cast it on the ground, where it broke into three pieces. Moreover, one of the thieves struck the image with his sword, inflicting two gashes. As he started to strike a third time, he fell down and writhed in agony until his death.[72] Such variants, together with common motifs, are indicative of the folkloric process at work and are nothing but a pious legend.

A further magical tale relates that after the Holy Picture was abandoned and found covered in dirt and blood, the monks wanted to clean it. However, all the wells were dry from putting out the fires set by the invaders' torches. Therefore, "It was at this time that a miraculous fountain sprung up, a spring that has since healed thousands and thousands of sick and has supplied water to millions of pilgrims"[73]

The image is also surrounded by a myth of origin according to which Mary assisted the Poles in almost every crucial moment of their national history. Most famous is the so-called Battle of Jasna Góra (1655), in which, according to legend, the divine assistance of Mary conquered the Swedish army during a siege of the monastery in the period of the Swedish Deluge. From this moment on, Mary, in particular Mary as represented by Our Lady of Częstochowa, gradually developed, following the terminology of Eric Wolf (1958), into a Polish master symbol that drew its power from its multiple meanings in different contexts. It became a symbol that unified widely diverging interests and thereby linked different groups together. Mary represented motherhood and devotion—thus appealing to all social classes—but also became a core symbol of the Polish resistance during tragic periods of its complicated history.[74] The Jasna Góra monastery is still without doubt not only a Marian shrine, but also a "sanctuary of Polishness".[75] References to the national dimension of Marian faith are abundantly present, for example, the scars on the face of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, are believed to symbolize the Polish national fate of foreign tyranny and

[69] Aradi, 63.
[70] Mullen 1998, 135–136.
[71] Aradi, 63.
[72] Cruz, 1993,400.
[73] Aradi, 63.
[74] Niedzwiedz, A. *Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol,* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314485295_Mary_in_Poland_A_Polish_Master_Symbol, 14 January 2019.
[75] Ibid, 94.

suppression. In addition, an alternative Stations of the Cross—Jasna Góra's Golgotha—shows Jesus in a Polish national context and accompanied by the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa. The idea that the Poles occupy a special place in Mary's heart is furthermore shared by the majority of all Polish visitors to Jasna Góra: 95 per cent regard Our Lady of Częstochowa as the Polish patron saint, and 88 per cent even consider her the symbolic queen of Poland.[76]

Fig. 9. Popular images of Black Madonna sold in the souvenir shops

Generally, it seems that Mary is far closer to humans and, indeed, far more human than Jesus. As a mother who lost her own child, who witnessed his death, and who participated in his pain, she is seen as a sorrowful mother who is also able to understand people's sorrows. This makes her a special patron particularly for women, but most of all for mothers and for those who are expecting a child. Conception of a child and a happy delivery are often recalled by interviewees as miraculous events mediated by the Virgin Mary.

The maternal aspect of the figure of Mary goes beyond the sphere of pure dogma and refers to universal human experiences. Mary symbolizes a universal mother-child relationship, in the sense that she offers limitless protection and help. She is an archetypal mother who, as in Slavic tradition in general, is directly linked with nature and fertility. Rituals, stories, songs, legends, and titles attributed to the Virgin Mary in traditional Polish folk culture depict her as a powerful feminine figure: the giver of life (Grąbczewski 1984).

Discussion and conclusions

Philological and ethnographic evidence strongly supports the notion that Baba Yaga has been present in Russian folk tradition much longer than written documentation alone attests. Persons well acquainted with this tradition repeatedly use the word "ancient" but

[76] Ibid.

usually without quantification. It is probably safe to infer that Baba Yaga was already established in folklore during medieval times. If Vladimir Propp was correct, we might even surmise that the Lady of the Forest and Baba Yaga had a common origin in distant Indo-European or even Proto-Indo-European times. Motifs may be shuffled between tales, and tales between cultures, and as Propp (1968) emphasized, different folk characters may be exchanged between tales, and the same function within tales might be fulfilled by different characters. Especially intriguing is the possibility that Baba Yaga and her hut are derived in part from ancient Baltic and Ugric beliefs. The same we can say about The Black Madonna. Both established their legend in the 18th century and are connected to the importants national historic events: Baba Yaga to the audacious sister of Peter the Great, Black Madonna to the battle against the pagan invaders. Both in my opinion can be seen as remnants of once strong feminine cults, that survived Christianization in the rural communities, especially among peasant women. Mokosh was in the end appropriated as a Virgin Mary in the last stadium of syncretism, and Morena was exiled to the fairy tales. Different conditions and historical determination caused different feminine roles to prevail: In Russia the knowledgeable forest goddess, in Poland goddess of fertility and protective motherhood. But it is possible, that both are the offspring of the supreme goddess of the Slavs, Deva-Rozenitsa, the wife of Rod, a representation of both the planet Venus and the Earth, the beginning and the end of a day, young and old, birth and death.

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